

Jan. 1, 1945
Belgium

Happy New Year, darling -

What a night! What a day so far! It's been like a combination of a Thorne Smith dream and a Hogarth print. I wish I had the power to really describe the fantastic and utterly ludicrous events as they transpired.

It began when Ernie and I, with our little Belgian date, sneaked into the movies late and kicked out the connections so everything came to an abrupt halt; lights went on, and frigid glares met our happy gaze. No, I guess it began before that, when after we met our little coiffure at the appointed place, we went over to another cafe to pick up an acquaintance of hers, and found said acquaintance firmly attached to one of the negro G.I.'s of the Quartermaster Corps. Well, everyone to their own taste, we say, looking at the whole thing from a broad point of view, and anyway, as Mariette said, "Il N'est pas Uraiment noir, sentement brun." So we had a couple of quick nips before our spectacular entrance into the show. Even the Movie, boring as it was, fitted into the mood of fantasia, Marlene in "Kismet." After the show we spent a lucid interval working hard on a couple of bottles of Scotch which appeared miraculously out of nooks and crannies. Gradually, the lucidity faded.

Outside, the night was beautiful! The full moon illuminated the clear, crisp, night air. The little village hummed and throbbed with activity. As we marched gaily "en masse" to the dance, our group gradually accumulated various non-descript flotsam and jetsam who were also weaving about the square.

Ah, the dance! Who can describe the Hogarthian monstrosity of that scene? The "hall" was a room about 40 feet by 30 feet, with a small stage at one end. On this eminence was placed a strange, machine-like contraption, mostly of wood, with attached whistles, cowbells, pipes, and sirens. It resembled a cross between a circus calliope and a wooden pipe organ, but its sound was utterly unique, a shrill, clanging cacophony. It ran on "rolls" like a player organ, but there were only four different "rolls", so there was a certain amount of repetition, not that it made any difference because none were recognizable either as to tempo or tune, and besides nobody made any attempt to dance in time, nor even, apparently, listened to it at all. I'm not even sure that the "organ" had anything to do with the dance at all. It could be that it was just there, and the old joker was merely playing it for his own amusement.

Anyway, in this dingy room were perhaps 100 people in various stages of decerebrate rigidity, milling and swaying slowly around and around, embracing each other fervently, a few were

unconscious against the wall, having already fallen by the wayside. Others dropped or fell on their faces from time to time, where they lay while others jeered and kicked them tenderly over into the pile beside the wall. Men "danced" with women, or men; and women, with women, or men. It didn't seem to make much difference; you merely clung on, and swayed.

The costumes? All kinds. Men mostly had overcoats and hats on; women in wool dresses, and sweaters; boots of various sorts; a mad, sweating, heaving, happy, drunken mass of humanity.

We entered into the affair with some spirit until overcome by the vapours of the place, whence we retired to the roadside where we stood around a tree, letting a bottle of Scotch circulate, closely followed by a bottle of soda water. Here we accumulated two Belgian guerillas of evil mein but mighty spirit; and from whom, for the remainder of the evening, we were inseparable.

About this time, in the proceedings, Jerry bombed the town. At least 50% of the people never even knew it was going on; and 95% of those who did thought it was ridiculous on his part to choose such a time for such a purpose. So they all just stood around and jeered and laughed. The only damage was that the lights went out, but that really didn't seem to make much difference in the visibility.

From then on, for a couple of hours, we toured the pubs, and bizarre were the sights and sound. Finally, we left our many friends and sought sanctuary in our sacks, everyone a little, but not too much, the worse for wear.

One thing we did accomplish. Arrangements were made for an expedition in a carriage to a nearby town this afternoon. I hope it comes off, as it promises to be an affair with some style.

So I must off to meet the group.

Lots of love, my sweet. I'll report of further adventures tomorrow.

Ever intrigued

H